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ABSTRACT

The school principal's leadership role in the operation of the reading resource teacher program is discussed in terms of (1) his conception of the total school reading program, (2) his perception of and relationship to the reading resource teacher, (3) his efforts to secure faculty support for both the overall reading program and the reading resource teacher program, and (4) his administrative responsibilities in support of the program. The school principal has the critical role in the planning, implementation, and operation of the reading resource teacher program at the building level. He is the link between the teachers and the administrators of the school system, so he must understand, direct, and support any program that is to succeed in his building. Some of his administrative responsibilities that are directly related to the reading resource teacher program include budgetary, staff, and liaison considerations. References are included. (Author/NH)

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THE PRINCIPAL AND THE READING RESOURCE TEACHER PROGRAM

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(Sessions: Reading Resource Teachers, Thursday, May 7, 1970, 9:00-10:00 a.m.)

The principal must be prepared to play a critical role in the planning, implementation and operation of the reading resource teacher program at the building level. While, as Professor Smith has pointed out, a basic intent of the program is to make assistance readily available to the principal as he attempts to improve the teaching of reading, the fact remains that the ultimate responsibility for the success of the program rests with him. A quote from Otto and Smith (1) tells in explicit terms why this is so:

> "Although the operation of schools is a far more democratic process than it once was, the Board of Education and the administrators hired by the Board are still the major policy determiners. 'Line' officers are the administrators who allocate budget and

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> who ultimately make the decisions that determine the goals of a school and how those goals will be achieved. It is the role of people in 'staff' positions to function according to 'line' decisions. Since line officers hire and evaluate staff, people in staff positions are generally responsive to the desires of line officers. In simple terms, Central Office staff members follow the direction of the Superintendendent of Schools and teachers follow the direction of their principals." (p. 176)

The principal, operating in a line position at the building level, must understand, direct and support any program that is to succeed in his building.

In this paper the principal's leadership role in the operation of the reading resource teacher program is discussed in terms of his (a) conception of the total school reading program, (b) perception of and relationship to the reading resource teacher, (c) efforts to secure faculty support for both the overall reading program and the reading resource teacher program, and (d) administrative responsibilities in support of the program.

The School Reading Program

The overall reading program of a school district and, in turn, in a given school building is a line responsibility. Line officers may consult staff members in establishing guidelines for the program; but the initial impetus, the general direction and the budgetary support must come from them. Since the principal is involved at the operational level, it is important that he have a reasonably clear conception of the goals and components of a viable overall reading program. This is particularly important in the present context, for a reading resource teacher program ought

from the very beginning to be an adjunct of--not a separate program from or a substitute for--the overall reading program.

One particular conception of what is involved in an overall reading program follows:

> "The ultimate goal of the reading program is reading achievement that approaches the limits of each person's capacity. The focus is upon the person, not upon groups or grade-level performance, for as we have shown, the mean scores of groups can be comforting but grossly misleading and grade-level performance may be beneath the aspirations and capabilities of some individuals and beyond the grasp of others. All instructional efforts are clearly subsumed by the goal of near capacity achievement for each individual, whether the efforts be essentially classroom-developmental or clinic-remedial. The overall program, then, must provide the master plan that includes articulation of objectives and coordination of instructional efforts ..."

> "Regardless of the specifics ... there must be a master plan. Without it, special programs, provisions for specialized personnel, and the within-classroom developmental teaching programs are likely to be nothing more than a disorganized conglomerate of bits and pieces: Remedial teaching, for example, is nothing more than isolated drill unless it is coordinated with the person's experiences in the classroom. Likewise, second-grade reading is nothing more than an arbitrary collection of skills unless it is coordinated with first-grade and third-grade reading; and a reading coordinator is likely to be

> little more than a fighter of brush fires unless he has some overall guidelines for his efforts. With a well conceived overall plan, the whole can be more than a simple sum of its parts." (Otto and Smith, 1970, pp. 28-29)

The point to be stressed here is that there must be an overall plan, and the responsibility for the plan rests with the principal. Given an overall plan for a reading program at the building level, the reading resource teacher program can be placed in appropriate perspective and the reading resource teacher will have a context in which to operate. Without such an overall plan the efforts of the reading resource teacher are likely to be dissipated through lack of direction and focus.

Relationship to the Reading Resource Teacher

The fact that the principal is in a line position and the reading resource teacher is in a staff position establishes the framework for the relationship: at the building level, the reading resource teacher is responsible directly to the principal. The functioning of the reading resource teacher is likely, therefore, to be heavily influenced by the principal's perception of (a) the reading resource teacher program as a potential vehicle for improving reading instruction, and (b) the reading resource teacher as a responsible supporting agent in the overall operation of the school reading program.

In practice, the reading resource teacher program has been established only in schools where there was an invitation from the principal. This, it seems to me, has been an important factor in the success of the program to date, for in all cases there is assurance that implementation of the program was begun only with the understanding and support of the principal. A related point here is that wherever a system-wide effort is to be made to

install such a program, a strong preliminary presentation ought to be made to the principals to prepare the way for its acceptance. Once the principals are sold on and enthusiastic about the program and its potential they are in a position to exercise the leadership and control that can virtually insure its success.

As Professor Smith has said, the reading resource teacher program was instigated to provide principals with assistance from specially trained persons relevant to their providing leadership in the area of reading curriculum development. While the specific roles and duties of individual reading resource teachers differ, they have in common their role as resource person to the principal of a given building. Each principal, then, sets the ground rules under which a given reading resource teacher operates. The essential point here is that it is the principal who sets the conditions that will ultimately determine whether the resource teacher becomes bogged down with day-to-day trivia or plays a vital role in improving reading instruction.

Efforts to Secure Faculty Support

The efficient functioning and dynamic development of both the overall reading program and the reading resource teacher program depends finally upon faculty acceptance and support. Support cannot begin to exist unless there is understanding. The principal, working with the reading resource teacher, can arrange formal and informal in-service sessions to provide essential information regarding both programs. Sessions can profitably be devoted to such topics as: (a) an operational definition of reading, (b) aspects of the overall developmental reading program, (c) essential skills in reading, (d) the reading resource teacher program related to the overall program, and (e) guidelines for program improvement. Such

sessions must, of course, be arranged in view of the existing state of affairs in a given school building; a system-wide presentation would probably turn out to be inappropriate.

Once the programs are understood, the next step is to secure faculty involvement in the development of and/or services provided by each program. The former can be nurtured by establishing cooperative working arrangements for program development--e.g., working groups for identifying essential skills, reviewing tests and materials, establishing cooperative grouping arrangements--and the latter by providing services that are in tune with needs perceived by teachers in a given situation. An example of the latter would be a cooperative tutoring program coordinated by the reading resource teacher in a situation where teachers frequently request tutoring for their highly mobile and experientially delimited pupils.

Administrative Responsibilities

In addition to his leadership responsibilities the principal has a number of administrative responsibilities related directly to the reading resource teacher program. Among these, the following have particular importance.

1. Securing budgetary support. Some released time--in the Madison experience, one-half day per week--must be provided for the reading resource teacher if she is to assume a significant role. In addition, support for the purchase of varied instructional materials and for consultative help when appropriate is required. Such support is most likely to be provided when the rationale for any request is carefully worked out.

2. Selecting and evaluating staff. While reading resource teachers are volunteers, the fact is that final selection and continued support is

up to the principal. Ultimately the responsibility for seeing that there is an effective person in the position is his.

3. Coordinating the school program with the district program. The specifics of both the overall developmental reading program and the reading resource teacher program are worked out at the building level, but ordinarily there are district-wide guidelines for the operation of the programs. Seeing that the specifics are in harmony with the guidelines is the responsibility of the principal.

4. Relations with the superintendent of schools. Responsibility for keeping the superintendent informed of developments, unique needs, progress and limitations lies with all the principals in a district. The superintendent's support of the program is--just as the faculties'--dependent upon his understanding of the facts as they exist.

References

1. Otto, Wayne, and Richard J. Smith. Administering the School Reading Program. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1970.